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# PHSB STUDIES

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## DIVORCE, MARRIAGE AND REMARRIAGE PROBABILITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA (With Implications for Fertility)

As custodian of the official records of all marriages and divorces occurring in North Carolina, the Division of Health Services routinely reports county-specific numbers and rates and, during the past year, prepared a descriptive report of the characteristics of persons involved in these proceedings (1). We have not, however, previously computed marriage and divorce probabilities due to the fact that, except for Census years, we lacked population bases specific for marital status.

The situation has now been remedied by virtue of using the geometric growth formula (2) to produce intercensal and postcensal population estimates specific for age, race, sex and marital status. While these estimates are known to be associated with some error (due to accelerated changes in marital behavior), we believe the growth formula minimizes the errors. Still, the reader should keep in mind that divorce probabilities presented here are probably understated while some marriage probabilities would tend to be overstated.

The reader should also be aware that marriage and divorce data are for N.C. occurrences rather than events to N.C. residents. In the case of divorce, the plaintiff (by law) must reside in the State but neither party to marriage is required to be a resident. Thus, probabilities of this paper are subject to bias to the extent that occurrences to out-of-state residents are not offset by out-of-state occurrences to N.C. residents. The extent of this bias is unknown, but the 1975 marriage file shows that both bride and groom were N.C. residents 81% of the time; one or the other was a resident an additional 8% of the time (1).

### Trends

According to provisional statistics for the first 9 months of 1976, North Carolina has just experienced its tenth year of uninterrupted increase in the divorce rate and its fifth year of decline in the marriage rate. These trends raise questions as to the changing probabilities for divorce, marriage and remarriage among different age-race-sex groups of the State's population and corresponding effects upon such crucial planning indices as the fertility rate.

Unfortunately, N.C. divorce registrations do not provide age, race and sex detail except for race of the plaintiff. These data are used in Table 1 to compare divorce probabilities in 1975 to those observed in 1965. Entries are the number of divorces per 1,000 women, specific for race of the plaintiff. Results show that while the probability of divorce is still greater for whites than for nonwhites, the nonwhite population appears to have experienced the greater increase in probability over the past decade.

